

Message Text

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ORIGIN EUR-12

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TO AMEMBASSY VALLETTA IMMEDIATE
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USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 159690

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAID, MT

SUBJECT: MINTOFF EMISSARY VELLA VISITS THE DEPARTMENT
REF: STATE 158187

1. ON JUNE 21 KARMENU VELLA, MALTESE MP, DESCRIBING
HIMSELF AS PERSONAL EMISSARY OF PM MINTOFF, ACCOMPANIED BY
MALTESE CHARGE AGIUS, CALLED ON ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY
(EUR) VINE. ALSO PRESENT WERE EUR/WE OFFICE DIRECTOR
AND NOTETAKER. IN COURSE OF 45-MINUTE DISCUSSION,
MALTESE MADE PLEA FOR IMPROVED US-MALTESE RELATIONS,
SPECIFICALLY URGING MORE FORTHCOMING US ATTITUDE ON
CONCESSIONAL LOAN FOR MARSAXLOKK DEVELOPMENT PROJECT, AND
AN EARLY VISIT TO VALETTA BY HIGH-LEVEL US OFFICIAL.

2. VELLA OPENED CONVERSATION WITH THANKS FOR SEEING HIM
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ON SUCH SHORT NOTICE. (LATER HE SAID HE WAS EMBARRASSED
BY PRECIPITOUS NATURE HIS DEPARTURE FROM VALLETTA, BUT
PRIME MINISTER HAD STRESSED URGENCY, AND VELLA HAD NOT
EVEN HAD TIME TO CALL ON AMBASSADOR LAINGEN.) GOM, HE
SAID, IS TRYING TO WORK OUT WAY TO IMPROVE RELATIONS
WITH US. PRESIDENT CARTER'S RECENT REPLY TO PM'S LETTER
HAD BEEN VERY WELCOME; ESPECIALLY ITS NICE TONE. GOM WAS

VERY DISAPPOINTED BY SUBSEQUENT LETTER FROM AMBASSADOR LAINGEN WHICH WAS NOT SO WELL RECEIVED. MALTA WOULD, THEREFORE, LIKE IN NEAR FUTURE TO BE VISITED BY HIGH-LEVEL

US OFFICIAL TO DISCUSS CURRENT SITUATION IN AUTHORITATIVE WAY. AFTER ALL, MALTA HAS BEEN TRYING IN VAIN FOR SEVEN YEARS TO HAVE SUCH A VISIT.

3. VINE INTERJECTED THAT AMBASSADOR LAINGEN IS IN VALLETTA FOR JUST THE PURPOSE OF CARRYING ON AUTHORITATIVE DISCUSSIONS WITH GOM. THE PRESIDENT APPOINTED HIM, AND WE HAVE FULL CONFIDENCE IN HIS CAPABILITIES AND WE UNDERSTOOD THAT HE HAD ESTABLISHED GOOD RELATIONS WITH PM MINTOFF. IS THIS NOT TRUE? VELLA CONFIRMED THIS TO BE THE CASE; HE SAID AMBASSADOR ALWAYS IS GIVEN APPOINTMENTS WITH PM WITHIN MINUTES WHENEVER HE ASKS. EVEN WITH A GOOD AMBASSADOR SUCH AS US HAS, MALTESE STILL WANT CONTACT WITH HIGH-LEVEL VISITOR. AGIUS INTERJECTED THAT SOMETIMES POLITICIANS (MINTOFF) ENJOY CONTACT WITH FELLOW POLITICIANS. WE HAVE NOT YET REALLY DISCUSSED POST-1979 US-MALTA RELATIONS. PRESIDENT'S LETTER WAS VAGUE AND HAS TO BE DEVELOPED FURTHER, AND A HIGH-LEVEL VISIT IS REQUIRED TO PROVIDE SOME IMPETUS.

4. VINE RECALLED CONTENTS OF PRESIDENT'S LETTER TO MINTOFF, EMPHASIZING US POSITION THAT QUESTIONS OF CONFIDENTIAL

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MALTESE NEUTRALITY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE WERE PRIMARILY THE BUSINESS OF MALTA'S EUROPEAN NEIGHBORS. USG, AS PROMISED, EXAMINED VERY CAREFULLY THE POSSIBILITY OF CONCESSIONAL LOAN FOR MARSAXLOKK PROJECT. WE HAD TO CONCLUDE THAT THIS WAS NOT POSSIBLE, GIVEN CURRENT LIMIT ON OUR AID PROGRAMS WHICH HAD TO FOCUS ON MOST PRESSING NEEDS OF POOREST NATIONS. OUR PRESIDENT HAS HIS OWN POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES (WITH CONGRESS ON QUESTIONS OF AID); VINE ASKED VELLA TO EMPHASIZE LATTER POINT TO HIS PM.

5. VELLA SAID MALTESE DID APPRECIATE PRESIDENT'S INTEREST AND INTERVENTION. ITS IMPACT WAS EVIDENT FROM THE WAY MATTERS HAD STARTED TO MOVE IN MALTA'S DEALINGS WITH EUROPEANS. IN ADDITION, WHAT MALTA NEEDED FROM USG WERE CONCRETE ASSISTANCE COMMITMENTS; THIS WOULD BE THE OPTIMUM RESPONSE. VINE REPLIED THAT, IN VIEW OF CAREFUL STUDY AND RESPONSE US HAD ALREADY GIVEN, MALTA WAS ASKING FOR MORE THAN THE OPTIMUM.

6. CONVERSATION THEN TURNED TO US SURPLUS EQUIPMENT EARMARKED FOR CASH PURCHASE BY MALTA AS DEMONSTRATION

OF US INTEREST. AGIUS SAID HE WAS NOT VERY IMPRESSED BY THE ARGUMENT; THIS WAS EQUIPMENT THAT, IF MALTA WERE NOT INTERESTED, US WOULD PROBABLY DISCARD. IN RESPONSE TO VINE QUESTION WHETHER THIS INDICATED MALTA WAS NO LONGER INTERESTED IN THIS EQUIPMENT, AGIUS SAID NO.

VELLA APPEALED FOR MORE US HELP FOR MALTA; SOMETHING TANGIBLE, HE SAID, WOULD AT LEAST BE GOOD FOR MALTA'S MORALE. HE WAS SURE US COULD SOLVE THIS PROBLEM.

7. VINE MENTIONED ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRIVATE US INVESTMENT IN MALTA AND CONVERSATION THEN TURNED TO ACTIVITIES OF READING AND BATES AND BROWN AND ROOT AS THEY RELATED TO MALTA. VELLA LAMENTED THAT, IN SPITE
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OF APPARENT GOOD WILL ON MALTESE SIDE, AMERICAN FIRMS DO VISIT MALTA BUT SOMEHOW CONCRETE RESULTS ARE LACKING. MALTESE DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY MORE PROSPECTS AND INVESTMENT DO NOT RESULT; THEY LACK FEEDBACK ON FIRMS' REACTIONS. VELLA COULD UNDERSTAND BROWN AND ROOT REFUSAL TO PARTICIPATE IN OFFERED JOINT VENTURE WHICH INVOLVED LIBYANS AS WELL AS MALTESE. AGIUS QUESTIONED ROLE OF USG IN ENCOURAGING US PRIVATE INVESTMENT, OBSERVING THAT USG DID NOT TAKE INITIATIVE TO ENCOURGE US FIRMS TO INVEST IN ANY FOREIGN COUNTRY, BUT ONLY ACTED IN RESPONSE TO EXPRESSED INTEREST OF US FIRMS. VINE CLOSED THIS PORTION OF CONVERSATION WITH COMMENT THAT HE WAS IMPRESSED THAT VELLA UNDERSTOOD THE FACTOR OF GOOD WILL, AS EVIDENCED BY HIS EARLIER REMARKS.

8. VELLA REVERTED TO QUESTION OF HIGH-LEVEL VISIT, NOTING THAT, EVEN WITH PLENTY OF POLITICAL GOOD WILL AT THE TOP, DEVELOPMENTS ARE OFTEN STYMIED BY UNDERLING CIVIL SERVANTS; HE NOTED HE WAS NOT ALLEGING THIS TO BE THE CASE IN CURRENT US-MALTA DEALINGS. VINE SAID USG WOULD EXAMINE WHETHER SUCH VISIT TO MALTA WAS POSSIBLE, BUT HE WAS REASONABLY CERTAIN THAT OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS IT WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION; OFFICAL CALENDARS OF APPROPRIATE PEOPLE WERE SIMPLY FILLED UP. AGIUS SAID THERE IS IN MALTA A SENSE OF URGENCY AND RECALLED AGAIN EFFORTS OVER PAST YEARS TO GET SECRETARY KISSINGER, AND THEN UNDER SECRETARY HABIB TO VALLETTA. VELLA EMPHASIZED THIS URGENCY, NOTING THAT NUMBER OF DELEGATIONS FROM MANY COUNTRIES WERE COMING, SOVIETS INCLUDED. MINTOFF IS TRYING TO KEEP THE LATTER AT ARMS LENGTH. VINE OBSERVED THAT THIS WAS A TRIBUTE TO PM'S SKILL.

9. VELLA THEN OBSERVED THAT PERHAPS US DOESN'T
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UNDERSTAND SITUATION. MALTA HAS HAD GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE WEST IN THE PAST. AFTER 1979, IF THESE RELATIONS CHANGE WITH THE WEST, MALTESE EXPECTED THEM TO CHANGE IN A POSITIVE SENSE, CITING RECENT RELATIONS WITH UK AS GOOD EXAMPLE OF POSITIVE EVOLUTION. IN CASE OF US, HOWEVER, MALTA IS NOT GETTING THE RIGHT RESPONSE. IN REPLY TO VINE QUESTION, VELLA SAID HIGH-LEVEL US VISITOR WOULD NOT NECESSARILY HAVE TO DISCUSS AID OR LOANS, BUT

GENERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

10. AGIUS RECALLED FONMIN ABELA PHONE CONVERSATION JUNE 15 WITH VEST WHO SAID NEW LIGHT HAD BEEN THROWN ON REQUESTS ABELA HAD CONVEYED. VINE SAID THAT VEST HAD TELEPHONED HIM TO REPORT THIS CONVERSATION AND VINE GOT CONTRARY IMPRESSION: VEST HAD CONFIRMED THERE WAS NO CHANGE IN US POSITION AND THE CONCESSIONAL LOAN REQUESTED WAS NOT POSSIBLE.

11. CONVERSATION CONCLUDED BY VELLA EXPRESSING HOPE USG WAS NOT SAYING THAT IF MARSAXLOKK LOAN WAS NOT POSSIBLE, NOTHING ELSE WAS EITHER. HE SAID MALTA WOULD LIKE SOME RETURN FOR ITS SERVICES TO DEMOCRACY AND PEACE OVER THE YEARS; EUROPE WAS NOT THE ONLY BENEFICIARY. THIS WAS NECESSARY TO KEEP MALTA WORKING FOR PEACE. VINE URGED MALTESE TO KEEP IN MIND THAT, RELATIVE TO MANY OTHER AREAS, MALTA WAS FAIRLY PROSPEROUS. VANCE

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